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SUBJECT: HONDURAN ELECTION UPDATE: LIBERAL PARTY CONVENTION

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reason 1.4 (b & d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Former Vice President Elvin Santos was formally anointed as the Liberal Party's (PL) Presidential Candidate at the PL Convention in Tegucigalpa on April 18, ¶2009. Santos in turn appointed Congressional President Roberto Micheletti as PL President despite objections from current Honduran President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya and previous PL President and current Foreign Minister Patricia Rodas. Partly thanks to Zelaya and Rodas' absence, but also because of Santos's charisma, internal squabbling and fireworks were mostly avoided and the Convention closed with ardent calls for PL unity. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Santos was unanimously declared the Official Presidential Candidate at the Liberal Party (PL) Convention on April 18, 2009 in Tegucigalpa. Originally scheduled to run for two days through April 19, the Convention ended early on the 18th after PL delegates elected its new party officials and candidates. Micheletti was declared President of the Party, 128 candidates were ratified as the PL candidates for Congress, 298 were confirmed to run for Mayor-ships, and 20 were designated to run for positions on the Central American Parliament. Santos closed the Convention with a rousing speech on party unity, stressing that the two main pillars of his campaign will be the economy and security.

Throwing Chairs

¶3. (C) The convention showcased some tense moments, which included the throwing of chairs and water balloons each time the controversial Micheletti was mentioned or participated. Convention participants alleged that Zelaya supporters attempted to disrupt the convention in protest over the fact that the convention was held on a date when the President was scheduled to be out of the country attending the Summit of the Americas. Other pundits believe the disruptions were directed at Micheletti because he has recently publicly opposed Zelaya's proposal to seek a constituent assembly to reform the Honduran constitution. Nevertheless, Zelaya supporters were very much in the minority and by the end of the day the PL seemed to have unified behind Santos' ticket. Santos will face National Party Candidate Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo in the November

29 general elections.

Micheletti Elected Liberal Party President

Comment

14. (C) Zelaya and Rodas have divided the PL in their bid to hold a national "encuesta" (or survey) on whether a referendum calling for a constituent assembly should be offered to the electorate during the general elections scheduled for November 29, 2009. Analysts claim that Micheletti has been the major bottleneck for Zelaya's and Rodas' plans. Micheletti's allegiance with Santos and his enhanced position of power in the PL appears to have weakened the virtual lame-duck Zelaya. According to analysts, Zelaya's next leverage point to garner support for his referendum could be his continued refusal to submit a 2009 budget to Congress, which would hamper both Parties' political campaigns by withholding their public monies. End Comment.
LLORENS